

Message Text

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44

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-11 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00

INRE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 OMB-01 OPR-02 A-01 OC-05 CCO-00

SY-05 SAB-01 /089 W

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O R 171258Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8192

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL STUTTGART

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION USUN NY

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER IMMEDIATE

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON UK

COMMSIXTHFLT

CTF SIX ZERO

CTF SIX ONE

CTF SIX TWO

CTG SIX ZERO PT TWO

FOSIF ROTA SPAIN

FICEURLANT NORFOLK VA

DIA WASHDC

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CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 553

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, LE

SUBJECT: SHIHABI LEAVES WITHOUT FIXING SUMMIT; BATTLES STILL ON

SUMMARY: CIVIL STRIFE CONTINUES AT HIGH INTENSITY IN SEVERAL PARTS OF COUNTRY. BATTLE LINES ARE MOSTLY STATIC, EXCEPT AT DAMOUR WHERE PALESTINIANS ARE ADVANCING ON CHRISTIANS AND ARMY. MOSLEM LEADERS HAVE CONDEMNED JAN 16 AIR STRIKE IN CECLARATION WHICH OTHERWISE FAIRLY MODERATE. SHIHABI RETURNED TO DAMASCUS LATE JAN 16 WITHOUT FIXING DATE FOR FRANGIE-ASAD SUMMIT. THAT MEETING NOT YET DERAILED, THOUGH TIMING IN COUBT. BEIRUT AIRPORT STILL CLOSED. END SUMMARY

1. WITH EXCEPTION DAMOUR FRONT ON COAST SOUTH OF BEIRUT, BATTLE LINES IN MOST PARTS OF COUNTRY INCLUDING CAPITAL HAVE BEEN RELATIVELY STATIONARY DURING LAST 24 HOURS, WITH COMBATTANTS SLUGGING AWAY AT EACH OTHER FROM FIXED POSITIONS. EXCHANGES OF FIRE WERE FAIRLY INTENSE AT TIMES IN MOST FIGHTING ZONES BUT HAVE DROPPED OFF SOMEWHAT MORNING JAN 17 IN BEIRUT.

2. BATTLE STILL RAGING AROUND DAMOUR. PALESTINIAN FORCES HAVE REPORTEDLY TAKEN JIYE AND DAMOUR DEFENDERS APPEAR TO BE IN DIFFICULT STRATEGIC POSITION. HOWEVER, ARMY HAS REINFORCED ITS FORCES IN DAMOUR WITH ARMOR AND COMMANDOS. JUST BEFORE DAWN JAN 17 ARMY AND PALESTINIANS CLASHED ON BEACH ROAD NEAR KHALDE, RESULTING IN THE CAPTURE OF TEN PALESTINIAN VEHICLES MOUNTING 106MM RECOILESS RIFLES AND HEAVY MACHINE GUNS. WARFARE BETWEEN ARMY AND PALESTINIANS BECOMING MORE AND MORE AN OPEN AFFAIR

3. POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS OF JAN 16 STRIKE BY LEBANESE MILITARY AIRCRAFT ARE LESS SEVERE THAN ORIGINALLY EXPECTED. MOSLEM LEADERS INCLUDING PREMIER KARAME WERE MEETING AT ARAMOUN AT TIME OF ATTACK AND SHARPLY REBUKED ARMY COMMAND IN STATEMENT ISSUED AFTER MEETING, BUT THEY FELL SHORT OF DECLARING POLITICAL WARFARE ON RIGHTIST/CHRISTIAN SIDE. STATEMENT CALLED ATTACK AN ACT OF "REBELLION" AND URGED A "REASONABLE POLITICAL ACCORD" AS SOLE MEANS TO END STRIFE.

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4. IT IS NOW FAIRLY CLEAR THAT GEN HANNA SAID PERSONALLY ORDERED AIR STRIKU, APPARENTLY ACTING ON GENERAL AUTHORITY HE HAS TO PROTECT ARMED FORCES AND PREVENT CIVILIAN MASSACRES. ORDER ISSUED WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE EITHER KARAME (WHOM GEN SAID INFORMED OF ATTACK BY PHONE DURING ARAMOUN MEETING) OR FRANGIE. HOWEVER, FRANGIE MAY HAVE INSTRUCTED SAID TO "DO SOMETHING" IN FACE OF DETERIORATION OF CHRISTIAN POSITION AT DAMOUR. THERE ARE CONFLICTING

REPORTS WHETHER AIRCRAFT HIT ONE OR MORE REFUGEE CAMPS AS WELL AS PALESTINIAN FORCES SOUTH OF BEIRUT AIRPORT, BUT WEIGHT OF EVIDENCE IS THAT LATTER WERE SOLE TARGET.

5. RELATIVELY MODERATE TONE OF MOSLEM DECLARATION AT ARAMOUN PROBABLY RESULTED IN PART FROM EFFORTS OF SYRIAN CHIEF OF STAFF HIKMAT SHIHABI DURING HIS BRIEF VISIT HERE. UNABLE TO CONFER WITH ARAMOUN CONFEREES PERSONALLY, DUE TO FIGHTING ON ROADS AND BAD WEATHER WHICH PREVENTED HELICOPTER FLIGHT, HE PHONED THEM AND COUNSELED RESTRAINT. HE SAW FRANGIE AND RETURNED TO DAMASCUS LATE JAN 16. UPSET BY AIR STRIKE, ACCORDING TO SOME REPORTS, HE MAY HAVE LEFT IN A HUFF; BUT OUR CONTACTS TELL US HIS VISIT INTENDED TO BE BRIEF IN ANY CASE. HE WAS UNABLE SET DATE FOR PROJECTED FRANGIE-ASAD SUMMIT. THAT MEETING STILL ON RAILS, THOUGH TIMING IN DOUBT. WE LEARN FRANGIE INTIMATE LUCIEN DAHDAH PROBABLY GOING TO DAMASCUS TOMORROW.

6. DESPITE WORSENING SECURITY AND POLITICAL SITUATION, OUR CONTACTS JAN 17 STRESS THAT CONTINUING EFFORTS BEING MADE TO ARRANGE CEASEFIRE. A CEASEFIRE ANNOUNCED FOR 0100 HOUR JAN 17 AFTER MEETING OF SECURITY OFFICIALS AND PLO'S ABU HASSAN (ALI SALAMA) PROVED FUTILE, BUT KARAME AND OTHERS CONTINUE TO CHIP AWAY AT TASK. MOST INTEREST CENTERS ON CALLS BEING MADBIJUH 17 BY ARAB AMBASSADORS IN BEIRUT ON KARAME OR FRANGIE TO EXPRESS ARAB "SOLIDARITY" BEHIND PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT. CEASEFIRE BETWEEN ARMY AND PALESTINIANS IS INITIAL FOCUS, EVEN THOUGH NEARLY ALL ADMIT THAT THIS IS ONLY PART OF THE PROBLEM. IN ANY EVENT, HERCULEAN JOB OF PUTTING TOGETHER A CEASEFIRE IN CURRENT SITUATION OF SPREADING CONFLICT THROUGHOUT COUNTRY. IF POSSIBLE AT ALL, IS CLEARLY NOT AN OVERNIGHT JOB.

7. CAMILLE CHAMOUN HAS EMERGED YET AGAIN AS HARDEST LINER ON CHRISTIAN SIDE. ACCORDING TO ONE REPORT, CONFIDENTIAL

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IT WASWXE WHO PUT FRANGIE UP TO TELLING GEN. SAID TO "DO SOMETHING" ABOUT DAMOUR SITUATION. IN A PUBLIC STATEMENT ISSUED FROM HIS RESIDENCE NEAR DAMOUR, CHAMOUN LATER CALLED ON FRANGIE TO "ASSUME THEIR HISTORIC RESPONSIBILITIES" AT THE PRESENT JUNCTURE. REPORT THAT HE IS ASSUMING MORE AND MORE UNYIELDING POSITION ARE FREQUENT. FACT THAT HIS LOCAL BASE AROUND DAMOUR UNDER THREAT IS OF COURSE A FACTOR HERE, AS WELL AS HIS WELL KNOWN TOUGH TALKING PERSONALITY.

8. BEIRUT AIRPORT STILL CLOSED, CHIEFLY BECAUSE TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS WHO ARE CHRISTIANS ARE NOT REPORTING FOR WORK. PRESENCE ARMED MEN ON AIRPORT ROAD REMAINS MAJOR THREAT, AND ARMY AGAIN REFUSES ESCORT EMBASSY PERSONNEL TO AIRPORT JAN 17. HOWEVER, AS FAR AS WE CAN DETERMINE, REPORTS OF MORTAR

ROUNDS EXPLODING ON RUNWAYS ARE NOT RPT NOT TRUE. PLANES
COULD LAND AND TAKE OFF IT THERE WERE SUFFICIENT CONTROLLERS.
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